

# 2012 Paddle to Squaxin Island - Teaching of Our Ancestors

By Brady Rossmagle

**Kamilche, WA** – From July 29, 2012 to August 5, 2012, the Squaxin Island Tribe hosted the 2012 Tribal Canoe Journey. “One of the things I will remember forever is watching the whole reservation come together to make this event happen,” said Monica Fierro, Olympia Division of Child Support (DCS).



Monica Fierro Lori Webb Fil Lipsker Ann Bailie Lisa Vasquez

They began in 1989 with nine canoes participating in the *Paddle to Seattle*. Since 1993, Tribal Canoe Journeys have been held annually, with various Tribes serving as the host Tribe. This year, several DCS staff attended the Canoe landing and the Potlatch at the Squaxin Island Community, in Kamilche, WA. Over 15 DCS staff volunteered by working one or more shifts, helping with registration, recycling/ composting, traffic control, distributing water, and meal set-up and clean-up.

DCS staff shared some great stories about people they met; how friendly and appreciative everyone was, the power of seeing the canoe landing; the impact of the drumming, dancing and storytelling at the Potlatch; and the wonderful hospitality of the Squaxin Island Tribe.

Over 10,000 people witnessed the *Paddle to Squaxin 2012* landing ceremony at the Port of Olympia, including many Tribal Leaders, Governor Gregoire, Olympia Mayor Buxbaum, and many DSHS Economic Services Administration (ESA) staff. “I attended the spectacular landing in Olympia on Sunday” said Lisa Vasquez, Olympia DCS. “I was amazed at the community turnout for this event...and seeing the approach of 98 canoes coming into Budd Inlet.” Tribal Canoe Journeys have helped form tight bonds between Pacific Northwest coastal tribes.



“All the people I met were so friendly,” said Michele Sommer, Tacoma DCS. “I feel honored to have been able to be a part of the potlatch – to witness the history, lessons and dances shared there; and to be able to be of service when an elder allowed me to help her find a seat and to serve some elders lunch.”





Rinae Perron, DCS HQ, and her daughter worked six shifts at the Potlatch over five different days. When asked about some of the things that stood out to her regarding the people and culture, Rinae shared “The intense respect Tribes have for elders and the generosity of the tribe(s) when they were hosts (both at this event and the smaller receptions when paddlers stayed overnight with other tribes), the commitment the community had to a drug and alcohol free event, and the commitment of a waste free event... A lot of us *talk the talk* about the environment, but they *walked the walk* at this event.”

Rinae continued: “I can’t tell you how many times I heard participants thank us for volunteering. I felt very appreciated. I want to learn more, and will go back to visit the museum.”

Lisa Vasquez agreed: “This experience was so rewarding...I will definitely look forward to other volunteer experiences in the future. The most rewarding part of the experience was the interaction with the people. They were so warm and welcoming.”

Gail Hanson, Tacoma DCS, said “I volunteered on both Sunday and Monday. It was fantastic. The people were very appreciative and gracious, and the volunteer teams were great to work with. I enjoyed the people most of all...They were all very grateful for the welcome and hosting by the Squaxin Tribe. One tribal member even sang songs in their native tongue, with drumming, to thank us for our work in the dining tent... This was like a “United Nations meeting of the Coastal Tribes of the Northwest”, with thousands more attending than I was ever expecting, and everything I saw was done in excellence. I was so pleased to get to participate, and yes, if I have a chance, I will participate again.”



“I enjoyed being able to meet many people from all over and learning about their culture and history. Everyone has a different story to tell about who they are, and where they come from. I felt all of them had the same heart to care for and support each other” said Fil Lipsker, Olympia DCS. “I would very much like to participate again and would encourage others to do so because of the experience and opportunity to meet new people who can make an impact on your life.”



Teia Neal, Tacoma DCS, shared: “What I will remember the most was how thankful and receptive the native people were. I was told by a tribal elder, as I sat next to him and enjoyed an authentic Indian taco, that he was appreciative for the time we take to volunteer because without it, these Tribal Canoe Journeys wouldn’t be possible.” Next year the Quinault Nation will host the Journey. The theme for the *Paddle to Quinault 2013* is “Honoring our Warriors.” For more information, see [www.paddletquinault.org](http://www.paddletquinault.org).